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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 003095

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SUBJECT: EVALUATING MINDEF DULAME

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David M. Satterfield for reasons

1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. After seventy five days on the job, Minister of Defense (MoD) Sadoun al-Dulame, one of six Sunnis appointed to cabinet-level positions in the Shi'a-dominated government, still seems committed to achieving the objectives he established when he became minister. Those objectives include defeating the insurgency as the ministry's top priority; rooting out corruption at the ministry; making the ministry a unified, professional organization, based on clearly-established policies and procedures; and unraveling the ministry's budget challenges. Since his first day in office, Dulame has made clear that achieving his goals will be very difficult. He expects to stumble and to create hostility, as well as to face political pressure, but vows to persist and succeed. Dulame has stressed that his duty as an Iraqi, not as a Sunni, is to build a competent and sustainable military force capable of protecting all Iraqis. He has made clear that he supports and needs the Coalition and seems to appreciate Coalition guidance.

¶12. (C) Summary, cont. Most persons interviewed for this cable rate Dulame's overall performance good and a marked improvement over that of MoD Shalan, his predecessor. All agreed Dulame is a hard worker. However, some people say he is a micromanager; that he is too much of a thinker, and not enough of a doer; and that he is not using his Sunni affiliation to full effect. Critics who raise these concerns fear that Dulame's shortcomings could undermine his ability to build a competent Iraqi armed force capable of defeating the insurgents, thus allowing for the withdrawal of Coalition Forces. Despite his weaknesses, Dulame has demonstrated strengths. The USG should do all it can to support this important Sunni in the Iraqi government. End summary.

Defeating the Insurgency

¶13. (C) On his first day at work as Defense Minister, Dulame announced to his staff that defeating the insurgency would be his first priority. Since then, he has taken several steps that show he means what he said. Dulame understands, for example, that solving the many problems afflicting the people of al Anbar, a western province accounting for a third of Iraq, is key to defeating the current phase of the insurgency. His deployment of Iraq's operational reserve to al Anbar and his standing up the remaining two brigades of the Iraqi Army Seventh Division at al Anbar exemplify his commitment to fighting the insurgency at its core.

¶14. (C) Despite criticism, Dulame has publicly expressed the ministry's continued need for and support of Coalition Forces, stating that the Iraqi Armed Forces would fail in their task without the Coalition. He meets with Coalition leaders regularly and listens respectfully to advice offered, but occasionally rejects it and then makes his own decisions. (Comment. According to Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO) advisors, Dulame has been surprised by how much advice he has been receiving from the Multi-National Coalition, and sometimes finds it overbearing. Dulame does speak English well, but it is difficult for him to understand American metaphors and slang. IRMO advisors think Dulame might be more engaging if his interlocutors were to speak to him directly using fewer American idiomatic expressions. End comment.)

¶15. (C) On May 27, Dulame held a joint press conference with Shi'ite Interior Minister Baqir Jabr to announce the launch of Operation al Barq (Lightning), a counter-insurgency operation carried out in Baghdad by what the two ministers estimated to be 40,000 MoD and Ministry of Interior (MoI) personnel. Dulame stated that "unprecedented strict security measures" would be seen, that security cordons would make it "impossible for terrorists" to move freely, and that Operation Lightning would reverse the Iraqi army's posture "from the defensive to offensive." The Coalition leadership was pleased with the joint pronouncement, and has requested more joint and individual public appearances to demonstrate ISF progress. Dulame has made two other press statements, both with the MoI, but does not appear enthusiastic about such events. (Comment. Some observers believe he fears a negative Sunni response; others think Dulame simply shuns the

spotlight, believing that public appearances should be reserved for critical moments. Other reports indicate that Interior Minister Jabr has to be cajoled into making public appearances along with Dulame. Jabr has made clear in private that he is not a fan of Dulame and thinks he is ineffective. End comment.)

The Sunni Effect on the Insurgency

16. (C) Post has hopes that Dulame will show himself to be a key Sunni leader capable of influencing other Sunnis to leave the insurgency and engage in the political process. Dulame meets regularly with local Sunni leaders, including imams and sheikhs who come often to the Ministry to discuss security concerns. According to IRMO advisors, the local Sunni leaders' primary requests generally revolve around the release of detainees and permission to establish local militias. Dulame perforce explains that the Iraqi judicial system must handle the former, and that the ITG and the TAL outlaw the latter. Informal interviews with a cross-section of Baghdad's citizens suggest that many respect Dulame, and believe security has improved in Baghdad since his arrival. They largely attribute this progress to the Iraqi army, not the Iraqi police. (Comment. This conclusion may simply reflect the Iraqis traditional positive view of the military, not a real comparison of security force effectiveness. End comment.)

17. (C) Coalition leaders believe Dulame could do more to reach out to the Sunni populace, and could be a more influential spokesman. In early June, LTG Robin Brims (British Deputy Commanding General of Multinational Force-Iraq), British Ambassador Patey, and DCM Satterfield had asked Dulame to go to Tal Afar to state publicly that Operation Veterans Forward was directed against terrorists, not Sunnis. In late June, LTG Brims repeated the request. Dulame demurred both times, saying only that he would "think about it". IRMO personnel averred that Dulame was not against the idea, but wanted to wait until after his travels to Brussels and Iran to make a public appearance and statement. Dulame went to Tal Afar with MNF-I's General Casey on July 18 to meet the troops and assess the progress; there was no public statement.

18. (C) Dulame does not appear interested in playing Iraqi politics. He seems determined to make decisions based on what he believes is best for the nation, not for a particular group or specific individual. He has avoided the appearance of being a tool of the Shi'a, balancing this by not leaning too far in the direction of his Sunni constituency. There does not appear to have been special privileges given to Sunnis in MoD or in the military during Dulame's tenure. But Dulame's individualism does not always play well with other Iraqi leaders, however. The Interior Minister Jabr has made clear that he does not believe Dulame is a team player. Prime Minister Jafari seemed taken aback when Dulame went to Iran on his own accord recently, even after Dulame had gotten word that he could have gone to Iran with the PM. Dulame's trip to Iran, his statement of apologies for the Iraq-Iran war, and his continued emphasis that "I am Iraqi, not a Sunni" has irritated several influential Sunni leaders and citizens. (Comment.

While not showing partisanship is good in many ways, some persons fear that Dulame may be increasingly isolating himself in ways that will ultimately affect his ability to lead the MoD. End comment.)

Fighting Corruption

19. (C) The MoD seems rife with corruption, a problem that may have intensified under the last administration. While it is a tremendous challenge to "clean house", Dulame has already made headway. He was behind the dismissal of the MoD Director General (DG) for Acquisition, Logistics, and Infrastructure. After the dismissed DG's personal secretary was found attempting to break into the former DG's sealed office trying to steal files, the secretary was also fired. The former DG is under investigation by the Iraqi Government for corruption. Although the charge against him involves the purchase of uniforms, he is also suspected of having signed many bad contracts, including a deal with Poland for 48 MI8 helicopters and 30 Sokol helicopters (estimated value, \$400 million). (Comment. Although the Iraqi Air Force needs helicopters, the number ordered exceeds requirements, and the type of helicopters was not approved by the MoD. Dulame may have unsuccessfully requested the Polish Ambassador's help to cancel or renegotiate the contract. End comment.)

10. (C) Part of Dulame's strategy against corruption is a policy that he personally review and sign all contracts below

\$3.0 million, regardless of how small. (The Prime Minister approves all contracts over \$3.0 million.) Some people believe the review is necessary, given the risk of corruption, the current contracting problems, and the uncertainty surrounding the MoD budget. Others believe that such "micromanagement" will further strain the troubled operations in the field and intensify the lack of trust within the ministry. IRMO advisors claim that stacks of contracts stood waiting for signature or funding even before this requirement took effect.

¶11. (C) Dulame's actions, while well intentioned, have not always improved the situation. Vendors have walked off the job while others have threatened legal action. During the third week in July, after being unpaid by the MoD for three months, a local caterer ceased delivery of food to the Iraqi Army's Second Brigade, which was recently assigned responsibility for securing northeastern Baghdad. Another vendor to whom MoD is in arrears suspended its trash and sanitation service to the Iraqi Army's Muthana base a few kilometers west of the International Zone. The MoD's persistent failure to meet contractual obligations, especially for logistics and life support, will adversely impact unit readiness and erode ISF support for the government. Likewise, Coalition-provided replacement funding for life support adversely affects the MOD and MNSTC-I plan to field the Iraqi Security Forces. (Minister Dulame affirms that one of his highest priorities is care for soldiers, which includes life support. He has given orders to pay the bills; orders that have not been fully implemented.)

Establishing a Professional Ministry

¶12. (C) Dulame's agenda includes establishing a professional, unified ministry with established and well-documented processes and procedures. According to the IRMO-MoD chief advisor, Dulame's first impression of the ministry was "chaotic". Noting the poor work ethic in time of crisis, he quickly charged each director general with getting his staff to work by 0800 every day. (Since many staff members sleep at the MoD as a safety precaution, this order has been "implemented."). The Minister also charged each DG with briefing him on his role, policies, plans, and challenges. Some of the information will be used to develop action plans within three months.

¶13. (C) Through many of his actions, Dulame is sending a strong message about the need for a positive work ethic. Persons willing to work hard will be heartened by this, but he may fail to attract even these followers if he continues to micromanage and show little trust in his staff. (Comment. A sign of the minister's lack of confidence in his staff was his recent designation of General Babakir (Commander of the Iraqi Armed Forces) to serve as Secretary General (traditionally a civilian position) while the incumbent takes leave. While this action reflected Dulame's trust in at least one senior military leader, it also made evident his distrust of many of his civilian subordinates. End comment.)

¶14. (C) Establishing a professional work force sometimes entails also getting rid of dead wood. Dulame has initiated a comprehensive review of the payroll. Although perhaps only symbolically significant, he has terminated the salaries of 28 personal advisors who were hired by the former minister. While on the books as employees, they could not be located during work hours.

¶15. (C) To reduce the potential for more bad decisions, Dulame has restructured the three bodies responsible for identifying and approving acquisition requirements. Previously, about two-thirds of the requirements council were senior civil servants, while the others were mid-level military officers. The military-civilian ratio has been roughly reversed and all council members are now of equivalent rank. Dulame also named himself chairperson of the approval body. Dulame took into consideration ethnicity and religion. (Comment. The real issue is not the civil-military or ethnic mix; it is acquisition transparency. It can best be assured by marginal changes to the various committees, not by making every acquisition decision one the Minister must make. End comment.) Dulame also approved a proposal to send an Iraqi delegation to various countries in an attempt to renegotiate contracts let under the previous administration. The value of these contracts approximates \$1.2 billion.

MoD Budget

¶16. (C) Dulame is trying to get a fix on the ministry's budget. He inherited the 2005 budget, which was initially \$1.3 billion. Perhaps because the ministry's officials are

not sure about the budget figures, they have not been forthcoming about what is left in the budget for 2005. The current budget must fund at least salaries. The ministry is also being asked to assume gradual responsibility for life support (food, water, waste removal, etc.) in 2005. In the near future, the Iraqi government will have to assume all operations and maintenance costs, and later, acquisition, construction and all other costs. Many observers believe that the current budget cannot sustain the existing force structure and doubt that MoD will be granted the necessary funds in the next few years to cover essential costs.

Outlook

17. (C) Despite the many challenges facing Dulame, the outlook at MOD is much better than it was during the previous minister's tenure. Dulame's anti-corruption measures may slow down bureaucratic processes, but the measures may eventually help develop a trusted core of bureaucrats who will share his vision and help him build the professional and honest ministry he desires and Iraq needs. He may not always be able to produce the desired results, but Dulame can be trusted to follow through when he gives his word. His emphasis on making his "own" decisions and "being an Iraqi not a Sunni" is positive, even if not without consequence. Some critics believe his individualism is isolating him from other key Iraqi leaders and the Iraqi citizenry. Despite his possible shortfalls, Dulame has demonstrated strengths; the USG should do everything possible to support this important Sunni representative of the Iraqi government.

Khalilzad